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UNCLAS TEL AVIV 000448

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM
NSC FOR NEA STAFF

SECDEF WASHDC FOR USDP/ASD-PA/ASD-ISA
HQ USAF FOR XXXX
DA WASHDC FOR SASA
JOINT STAFF WASHDC FOR PA
CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR
COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE FOR PAO/POLAD
COMSIXTHFLT FOR 019

JERUSALEM ALSO ICD
LONDON ALSO FOR HKANONA AND POL
PARIS ALSO FOR POL
ROME FOR MFO

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E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [OPRC](#) [KMDR](#) [IS](#)

SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

- [1](#)1. Iran
- [1](#)2. Islamic Extremism

Key stories in the media:

Ha'aretz's web site quoted PM Ehud Olmert as saying today before a

business conference in Tokyo that he is not certain that Israel and the PA will be able to reach a peace agreement by the end of 2008, as they committed themselves to doing in the Annapolis conference. "We have a desire to reach an agreement within the year 2008," Olmert was quoted as saying. "I am not sure we will make it, but we are determined to make a giant step forward to end this dispute once and for all," he added.

All media reported that on Monday rocket fragments injured three Sderot residents, including a 10-year-old Sderot boy who was hurt in the shoulder. The media reported that rocket fire on Israel started shortly after the Palestinian demonstration south of the Erez crossing died out. The media generally reported that the demonstration was a PR exercise that is bound to repeat itself perhaps more seriously.

Yediot reported that despite Defense Ministry statements to the contrary, Israel has resumed the supply of electricity to Gaza.

The Jerusalem Post, Makor Rishon-Hatzofe, and other media reported that on Monday senior members of Kadima and the government coalition (including Rafi Eitan of the Pensioners Party, the cabinet minister in charge of Jerusalem affairs) expressed their opposition to making concessions in Jerusalem. The Jerusalem Post reported that on Monday a group of right-wing legislators charged PM Olmert with freezing construction in Jewish neighborhoods of East Jerusalem as a result of the peace negotiations with the Palestinians. Maariv quoted a senior official in the bureau of Communications Minister Ariel Attias of Shas as saying that Shas will not quit the government coalition even if Israel returns the Western Wall. Maariv, which reported that the official later denied having made the comments, noted that such statements and allegations reflect an internal struggle within Shas.

Yediot quoted Vice PM Haim Ramon as saying that the total freeze of construction in the settlements will be partially lifted within one or two months. The Jerusalem Post quoted Ramon as saying that not a single outpost has been established in the West Bank since 2005.

The Jerusalem Post and Makor Rishon-Hatzofe quoted Democratic presidential hopeful Sen. Barack Obama as saying on Sunday in a closed-door meeting with several members of Cleveland's Jewish community: I think there is a strain within the pro-Israel community that says unless you adopt an unwavering pro-Likud approach to Israel, then you're anti-Israel, and that can't be the measure of our friendship with Israel." The Jerusalem Post reported that on Sunday on NBC-TV's "Meet the Press," independent presidential candidate Ralph Nader attacked Obama for allegedly concealing his "pro-Palestinian" feelings.

Ha'aretz cited a report that the children of Israeli emigrants are detaching themselves from Israel.

Leading media reported that Israel has postponed a planned meeting with Costa Rican officials over the Central American nation's decision to formally recognize a Palestinian state.

The Jerusalem Post and Israel Radio quoted Syria's Ambassador to the U.S., Imad Mustafa, as saying on Monday that there will be no Israeli-Palestinian peace deal this year, adding that the Annapolis conference was only an "exercise in public relations."

Israel Radio and Ha'aretz's web site reported that on Monday a U.S. federal judge ruled that Iran must pay more than \$33 million to the family of David Ben-Rafael, a U.S.-born Israeli diplomat killed in the 1992 bombing of the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires.

South Korea's Ambassador to Israel, Dr. Shin Kak-soo, was quoted as saying in an interview with Ha'aretz that the top priority of new South Korean President Lee Myung-bak will be a solution to the North Korean nuclear problem.

Electronic media reported that this morning a five-justice panel of the High Court of Justice, headed by Supreme Court President Dorit Beinisch, rejected, 3-2, petitions against the plea bargain arranged with former Israeli president Moshe Katsav. Beinisch held a minority view. The petitions were filed in response to Attorney General Menachem Mazuz's decision in June 2007 to sign a plea

bargain with Katsav that eliminated two counts of rape that had appeared in the draft indictment. It also eliminated several other charges, including two counts of forcible indecent assault and one of sexual intercourse while exploiting an employer-employee relationship. The plea bargain includes only minor sexual offenses -- one count of indecent assault involving pressure and one of sexual harassment -- and would give Katsav a suspended sentence rather than actual jail time.

Ha'aretz and The Jerusalem Post reported that on Monday the Immigration Police raided the area around Tel Aviv's old central bus station and arrested more than 240 asylum seekers, most of them from Eritrea and some from the Ivory Coast. The raid followed PM Ehud Olmert's order to deport all infiltrators who lack UN certification as refugees by the end of the week.

Makor Rishon-Hatzofe reported that Israel has sent Kenya 800 kg of medical equipment.

The electronic media reported that Dan Shomron, who was IDF chief of staff from 1987 to 1991, passed away today at the age of 70.

All media reported that the Bank of Israel lowered central bank interest rates for March by 0.5%; the prevailing expectation in the marketplace had been that Governor Stanley Fischer would leave the central bank rate unchanged or reduce it by only 0.25%.

11. Iran:

Summary:

The independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized: "The most important development in dealing with the Iranian nuclear program is intra-American."

Senior columnist and longtime dove Yoel Marcus wrote in Ha'aretz: "Without making light of the power of the Israeli Air Force and its excellent pilots, this is not something we should be doing on our own. Israel needs the cooperation, consent and support of the United States and the European Union in order to defend itself."

Block Quotes:

11. "Sanctions to Gain Time"

The independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized (2/26): "The United Nations Security Council is discussing a draft resolution this week that to a small extent tightens economic sanctions against Iran.... [But] the most important development in dealing with the Iranian nuclear program is intra-American.... Since the publication of the [National] Intelligence Assessment, and the gleeful reactions to it in Tehran, Washington has come to its senses and is trying to state things precisely.... The standard-bearer for the Republican Party, Senator John McCain of Arizona, is partner to Bush's belligerent stance against a nuclear Iran. The Democrats have not yet stabilized around a candidate and only in the duel between the candidates of the two parties this fall will there be an airing of the differences of opinion on foreign affairs and security issues, among them a nuclear Iran. The mission, then, is to get to the next administration with a reasonable opening position in the international arena, in the shape of resolutions on sanctions. This is not a lot, but it is not realistic to expect the world to embark now on a war for which, in its opinion, the time is not yet ripe. From Israel's perspective, this is not heartening news. Its hope that international elements will deal with the Iranian atom for their own sake and spare Israel difficult decisions is liable to turn out to have been an illusion."

II. "The Goal: Annihilating Israel"

Senior columnist and longtime dove Yoel Marcus wrote in Ha'aretz (2/26): "Israel is the only member of the United Nations that is

being openly threatened with destruction -- not just as a country but as a Jewish state. Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who never loses an opportunity to sow hatred against the Jews, is busy drumming up support for the annihilation of Israel.... [A] possibility is for Israel to get parliamentarians of European Union countries to convince their governments to stop selling bomb-making materials to Iran. But the most important thing of all is to make the U.S. Congress understand the dangers that loom over its sane allies in the region. From what we are hearing these days, the next American president is not going to be as friendly or involved in the war on Islamic extremism as George W. Bush.... Even if Ahmadinejad doesn't use the bomb -- if he ever gets his hands on one -- there is no question that this threat looming over our heads is liable to undermine the whole concept of Israel being the only safe haven for the Jewish people. Under the circumstances, it is important for Israel to avoid collective punishment of the population of Gaza, lest it lose international support for its efforts to block the Iranian nuclear program. Without making light of the power of the Israeli Air Force and its excellent pilots, this is not something we should be doing on our own. Israel needs the cooperation, consent and support of the United States and the European Union in order to defend itself."

12. Islamic Extremism:

Summary:

Middle East scholar and former senior diplomat Zvi Gabbay wrote in the popular, pluralist Maariv: "Media attention is focusing on the boastful statements of leaders such as Nasrallah and Ahmadinejad, but it neglects the non-confrontational voices of Arab intellectuals, who dare to stand as buffers against the despots."

Block Quotes:

"Another Arab Voice"

Middle East scholar and former senior diplomat Zvi Gabbay wrote in the popular, pluralist Maariv (2/26): "Media attention is focusing on the boastful statements of leaders such as Nasrallah and Ahmadinejad, but it neglects the non-confrontational voices of Arab intellectuals, who dare to stand as buffers against the despots, asking them harsh questions about social issues and human rights. These intellectuals express real concern for their people, who groan under the tyrannical regimes of leaders whose main concern is preserving their power. The linkage that the leaders make between dealing with the Arab-Israeli conflict and the gloomy situation of the Arab nations is no longer acceptable to many people in Arab countries. However, they are unable to express their opinions in their own countries, and they publish their statements in Arabic newspapers that are published mainly in London. Among the intellectuals who dare to speak against accepted convention are the Saudi Arabian Ali bin Talal el-Jihani. In an essay that was published in Al-Hayat (December 11, 2007), he criticizes politicians, Sunni or Shi'ite, who use Islam to justify terrorism. He claims that this was forbidden by all streams of Islam 'even before the coming of Khomeini and the ascent of his supporters in Lebanon and Palestine.' El-Jihani claims that terrorism in the name of Islam has damaged the Arabs and the true image of Islam.... In the newspaper Ilaf, which is published in London, Khadeir Taher, an Iraqi Shi'ite, laments the ethnic struggles in Iraq in which, in his opinion, the Syrian and Iranian secret services have a hand. Besides, he also dares to note that 'what happens in Lebanon and in Palestine' is the result of provocative acts by the 'Iranian fools and mercenaries.' The author does not forget to note in the margins of his essay that if not for the newspaper in London, he would not be able to express his opinion. Abd el-Halek Hassin wrote on the Internet that the Middle East will not become calm until the elimination of the 'fascist regimes in Syria and Iran and their burial together with the Iraqi Ba'ath regime.' Only then, in his

opinion, will it be possible to solve the problem of the Arab-Israeli conflict 'by negotiations as conducted by Sadat, who won back all of his land without spilling one drop of blood'.... When Arabs win freedom of the spirit, repose will come to the Middle East."

JONES